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ABSTRACT

A method of evaluating bilingual-bicultural education programs that has a sociolinguistic basis uses samples of the language spoken by a number of bilingual program students as they go through their school day. A random sample of the child's speech would be continuously recorded for an hour, with a bilingual observer taking running notes on where the child was and what he was doing while speaking. The observer would later code the language forms the student, teachers, and peers used to identify the "social punishment" administered intentionally or unintentionally. The costs would be greater than those of administering standardized tests, but not more than other observation methods. The major advantage of this method is that it provides direct measures of the actual speech behavior relevant to program effectiveness in language maintenance, and it also allows staff to hear their own and students' school talk as a basis for formative evaluation and inservice training. (MSE)

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THE POLITICS OF SPEAKING: AN APPROACH TO EVALUATING BILINGUAL-BICULTURAL SCHOOLS

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THE POLITICS OF SPEAKING: AN APPROACH TO EVALUATING BILINGUAL-BICULTURAL SCHOOLS[1]

Frederick Erickson[2]

In this paper I want to suggest a new set of strategies for evaluating bilingual-bicultural education programs: strategies that I think make more sense than many of those currently used by evaluators. I am going to propose a way to look at the "political" contexts of speaking in school. Before doing this, however, it is necessary to review briefly the social and political contexts of bilingual-bicultural schooling itself, how programs have been established, and who decides how they are to be evaluated.

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

The advent of public support for bilingual-bicultural education in the United States in the late 1960's may have marked a watershed in the life of our society. Or it may be a passing fancy. It is too soon to tell. At any rate, local, state, and

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[2]The author wishes to thank Jeffrey Shultz for advice and criticism.

federal governments, the United States Office of Education, and major private foundations did decide to provide legal status and financial resources for bilingual-bicultural school programs. This constitutes the first official recognition by American society of the legitimate existence of "cultural differences" between groups of citizens. The legislation and funding guidelines for bilingual-bicultural programs presuppose that differences exist. Being culturally "different" and having a mother tongue other than English is not a social deficiency. On the contrary, it is an individual, group, and societal resource that should be fostered.

Clearly, this shift in public educational policy did not happen overnight. It resulted from decisions that were political in nature--"political" not in the pejorative sense but in the sense that these were collective decisions, informed by public debate, about changing the curriculum and the form of social relations in schools (which are agencies of government). These changes modify what happens everyday in school, striking a new balance in the interplay between the interests of various ethnic groups in cultural pluralism on the one hand, and the presumed national interest in cultural homogeneity on the other hand. One does not have to be a flaming radical or hidebound conservative to characterize this as an essentially political decision arrived at by essentially political processes.

Just as the legitimacy of existence of bilingual-bicultural education programs is contingent upon "political" decisions, so is the legitimacy of means of evaluating those programs. De-

cisions about what constitutes reasonable and appropriate criteria and methods for research are essentially made "politically."[3] Directors of bicultural programs find themselves and their programs whipsawed between two sources of constraints on the form evaluation can take: (1) the limits of sophistication of the evaluators who may lack skills in measuring anything but what they usually measure, and (2) the limits of sophistication of the funding agency or agencies requiring evaluation (often some combination of a local school board, a state education agency, and a federal program). Agency personnel may not accept a non-traditional kind of evaluation, even if competent researchers could be found to design and conduct it.

RATIONALE FOR ALTERNATIVE EVALUATION DESIGN

Let us define the kinds of bilingual-bicultural education programs for which alternative evaluation strategies might be relevant. Let us assume programs that have among their major

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[3] Not only are public agencies involved in deciding about what kind of research should be done, thus opening the decision process to "political influence" in the normal sense of the term, but the social scientific community itself is a "public," a "polity" governed by community opinion about its community of discourse--about what research problems and methods are legitimate subjects of investigation and debate by the community (Kuhn, 1962). All this may be healthy, and seems to be inevitable since scientific opinion is always in process of evolution, but the existence of "community culture" affecting <u>opinion at any moment in time</u> makes possible "cultural lag" in <u>opinion across time</u> in the scientific community as well as in governmental bureaucracies. In this respect social scientists are no more "rational" in thinking about social issues than anyone else.

aims language maintenance rather than language transfer.[4] These programs are grounded on the premise that it is good for children in school to keep speaking the language they speak at home as well as it is good to learn new kinds of language. Keeping alive a language spoken at home can be justified as a symbol of community survival and influence. It can also be justified in terms of its "good" for individuals, since there is some evidence that suggests that being multilingual is developmentally enriching (Gumperz and Hernandez-Chavez, 1972). If anyone is "culturally deprived" (and many of us would agree that this is a mistaken notion), it is the monolingual child not the multilingual child.

Current sociolinguistic research suggests that no "normal" child is actually "monolingual." Even those of us who speak only one "language" speak it in markedly different ways depending on who we are talking to and where we are talking. Within any "language" system other than "English," and in "English" as well, there are not only regional and social class variants or "dialects," but situational variants or "dialects." These variants in language form can be demonstrated to have social as well as referential "meaning" (Gumperz and Hernandez-Chavez, 1972; Blom and Gumperz, 1972; Erickson and Shultz, 1973). The manner or style in which we say things to others provides information about what we think of them (who we conceive them to be as social persons) and what

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[4] I realize that bilingual educators, members of language communities, and state laws vary in their position on this issue, but let us assume programs that have staff and parent support, as well as legal authority, for language maintenance as a major aim.

we think of ourselves (who we conceive of ourselves to be as social persons). As Hymes (1967) has so aptly put it, language behavior is social behavior and linguistic competence is social competence.

The most obvious example of this in many languages is personal pronoun usage: the *tu-usted* distinction in Spanish and other Romance languages, *du-Sie* in the Germanic languages, and *you-thou* in archaic English (Brown and Gilman, 1960). There are also gross changes in phonology, grammar, and lexicon that can accompany changes in the social relationship between one speaker and a series of others who differ in age, rank, and intimacy with the speaker (Labov, 1966). In the studies by Blom and Gumperz (1972) and Shultz and myself (1973), it is shown that within a single conversation between the same speakers there are changes in language form that seem to indicate changes in the social relationship from moment to moment between speakers. There seem to be rules for how to say what to whom in a variety of situations. The study of the variation in these rules of speech behavior has been termed (Hymes, 1962, 1972) the "ethnography of speaking."

In addition, there are social punishments and rewards for speaking inappropriately or appropriately in a given situation. For example, if a child used a familiar form of address to an adult stranger, this might well be a situationally inappropriate usage that would be responded to by the adult "correcting the mistake." So, one aspect of an "ethnography of speaking" might be an "ethnography of the politics of speaking." Such study would identify (1) what kinds of social costs and benefits accrue to different ways of speaking in different situations, (2) which

member of the conversation defines what ways of speaking are situationally appropriate, and (3) the power and authority relationship between the definer of appropriateness and the speaker.

A SOCIOLINGUISTIC DESIGN FOR EVALUATION RESEARCH

It seems to me that the "politics of speaking" is a kind of sociolinguistic analysis that could be relevant to the evaluation of bilingual-bicultural programs that have language maintenance as a major aim.[5] One could judge the "effectiveness" of such bilingual-bicultural programs by two criteria: (1) the range of variants of both "languages" that students are encouraged to speak and actually do speak while attending the program, and (2) the percentage of total daily talk in the program by students in their mother tongue. (By "encouraged to speak," I mean receiving positive reinforcement from peers and staff.)

We assume that it is "good" for American children to keep their mother tongue if it is other than English. It is also good to learn to speak in a wide variety of ways in both languages. No school program for language maintenance should be judged "effective" in which students whose first language was not English received punishments from peers and staff for (1) speaking the first language rather than speaking English, (2) speaking a "non-standard" social class or regional variant of English, or (3)

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[5] Note, however, that apart from language maintenance, the methods and procedures for this evaluation are also appropriate for the analysis of linguistic form and social meaning in the speech behavior of children.

speaking a non-standard social class or regional variant of their own first language.

This approach to evaluation would view the school program as a compendium of social situations in which many different kinds of language could be functionally appropriate. While "classroom language with the teacher" may differ from "hallway language with other people," and "playground language with peers," one can speak functionally in all three settings in different forms of both one's mother tongue and English. For example, in an "effective" program for students whose first language was some variant of Spanish, students would not be "corrected" by teachers for speaking non-standard Spanish in the classroom except during special "language lesson periods," which would be explicitly marked as special by the teacher. Children would also not be corrected by teachers and other people or teased by peers for speaking non-standard Spanish or a mixture of Spanish and English in the hallway. Indeed, the children would be encouraged in many school settings everyday by peers and by adults to speak the language variant spoken at home. In addition, children would not be punished for speaking non-standard English not only in the hallway but in classroom. No language use by students would be "politically illegitimate" or "subversive."

By analyzing the actual "politics of speaking" in a program, researchers could determine how much the formal curriculum and social organization of the program was fostering first language maintenance. In addition, and perhaps even more importantly, this approach to evaluation could determine whether or not the

informal or "hidden" curriculum and social organization of the program was inadvertently discouraging students from using their first language despite the best intentions of the staff, parents, and the students themselves. In this respect, Shultz and Harkness (as reported in Shultz, 1973) found that in a bilingual classroom whose staff had the manifest aim of fostering first-language maintenance, the latent, informal structure was such that Spanish-speaking children got more "payoffs" from speaking English than from speaking Spanish. This occurred without either member of the classroom teaching team (one bilingual in Spanish and English, one monolingual in English) realizing that this "hidden social structure" and "hidden curriculum" existed or that it was contradicting what the teachers thought they were doing.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES FOR STUDYING THE POLITICS OF SPEAKING

The basic procedure would be to collect samples of the language spoken by a number of students in the bilingual program as they went about their daily round. A random sample of students' speech would be continuously recorded for an hour. A bilingual observer would take running notes on where the child was and what he was doing while speaking. The observer would later listen to the tapes and code the form of language used as well as the response of the child's peers and teachers. The purpose would be to identify each "social punishment" administered intentionally or unintentionally.

If it seems that "too much" data is being collected, segments

from the tapes can be picked randomly to decrease the amount of coding necessary. The cost of this kind of evaluation procedure would be greater than administering standardized tests but no greater than other observational methods, such as the Flanders classroom interaction scale.

The major advantage of this sociolinguistic approach to evaluation is that, unlike standard tests and observation schemes, this approach provides direct measures of the actual speech behavior relevant to program effectiveness in language maintenance. In addition, the tapes, once made, enable the program staff to listen to students and to themselves engaging in various kinds of "school talk." Thus, the tapes could become a data base for "formative evaluation" and inservice education conducted by teachers for themselves, individually, and in small groups.

NEGOTIATING THE LEGITIMACY OF EVALUATION STRATEGIES

When I suggest new ways of evaluating programs of bilingual-bicultural schooling, I am proposing changes that will not be easily or quickly accomplished. Pressure for change would be met by counterpressure from traditionally legitimate evaluators and funding agencies. Still, it seems to me that only if a dialogue begins now about alternative ways of evaluating bilingual-bicultural programs, which represent a new kind of education in the United States, will any new methods and theoretical orientations for evaluation become legitimate over the next five to ten years. Since the methods I am proposing here are already available, it would be especially tragic if this approach could

not be used simply because of "cultural lag" in definitions of research legitimacy by funding agencies. By the time the new methods became legitimate, current bilingual-bicultural programs might have ceased to exist.

I am not suggesting a new evaluation strategy by which all current programs would be guaranteed "good marks" and continued funding. On the contrary, the methods I propose would be more rigorous in evaluating language maintenance than are the methods currently used. If ineffective programs are to be eliminated or changed, this should be done by studying the "politics of speaking."

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